

Wisconsin
Department of
Natural Resources

NEWS
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Special Edition
2002 Fall Hunting Forecasts

White-tailed deer forecast	Pgs. 2-4
Chronic wasting disease zone special regulations.....	Pg. 5
Baiting prohibited during this year's hunt	Pgs. 6-7
500 deer per county to be tested for CWD.....	Pgs. 8-9
A chronology of Wisconsin deer hunting	Pgs. 10-12
Black bear forecast	Pgs. 13-14
Upland game forecast	Pgs. 15-16
Furbearer forecast	Pgs. 17-20
Waterfowl forecast	Pgs. 21-22
Fall hunters reminded to make safety a priority.....	Pgs. 23-25

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Dear Wisconsin hunter,

September in Wisconsin brings crisp, cool weather, fall colors, Packer Sundays, and the start of our treasured hunting seasons. Ruffed grouse, Canada goose, black bear and white-tailed deer – these are among the seasons opening in coming weeks to offer us a great opportunity to exercise, to enjoy Wisconsin's great outdoors and the companionship of our families and friends, and to create the memories of a lifetime.

The events of the past six months have been sobering for everyone. The discovery of chronic wasting disease in wild deer in south central Wisconsin has brought home the importance of our native wildlife, our hunting heritage and our role as conservationists. We are challenged this fall to assure all three survive and thrive for generations to come. An important way we can do that is by hunting.

Darrell Bazzell,
Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources



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2002 Deer Season Forecast

By Brad Koele, assistant DNR deer and bear ecologist

With a statewide white-tailed deer herd they are estimating to be 1.6 million animals, state wildlife biologists say hunters will again have extra hunting opportunities in Wisconsin in 2002.

Because of the high deer population, the state Natural Resources Board has again approved special herd control seasons recommended by Department of Natural Resources deer biologists. There are 41 Deer Management Units (DMUs) that will be in a Zone T status (four units were removed from the Zone T framework and are now governed by special chronic wasting disease regulations). A deer management unit falls under the Zone T framework if wildlife biologists predict that the traditional deer season framework will not reduce the deer population to within 20 percent of that unit's over wintering population goal. Zone T units are open to special antlerless-only hunts held in October statewide and in the southern two-thirds of the state in December.

Some of this year's Zone T DMUs will have been in that category for their second or third year. To minimize conflicts with winter recreation in the northern part of the state, Zone T DMUs north of Highway 8 will not be open for the December Zone T season. Hunters should check the 2002 DMU map to see which units are designated for Zone T in 2002. In addition to Zone T, many DMUs will have bonus antlerless permits available for hunters who wish to harvest additional antlerless deer.

Another change for 2002 are special rules and regulations for DMUs located in the Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Management and Intensive Harvest Zones. These Zones include DMUs 70, 70A, 70B, 70E, 75A, 75C, 75Department of Natural Resources, 76, 76M, and portions of units 54B, 70G, 71, 73B, 77A. State Park DMUs in this area will also be subject to rule and regulation changes. These units will have extended gun hunts depending on which CWD zone (management or intensive harvest) the unit is located in and will have an "earn-a-buck" format where a hunter must harvest an antlerless deer before harvesting an antlered buck. Hunters planning on hunting one of the CWD Zones should review the special CWD Regulations Pamphlet for specific details on hunting dates, rules and zone boundaries.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:: Brad Koele at (608)-261-7589 or
regional contacts listed below

DNR Regional deer forecasts

Northern Region

By Mike Zeckmeister, DNR Northern Region wildlife biologist - (715) 623-4190

Deer numbers and hunting opportunity should be excellent in the Northern Region in 2002. The winter was mild in all but the snow-belt units, and even there it was only moderate. There should be very good recruitment into the herd. In the far north, almost all units will be in Zone T status. This year there will not be a December hunt as part of Zone T in northern units. The rest of the northern units are in conventional buck plus quota status. In all but a handful of units there will be bonus permits available.

The gun season will be late this year, so it is not likely that bucks will be in rut during gun season, as they were last year. A later season increases the possibility of snow, which can be good for visibility or tracking, but also a detriment if there is too much for mobility.

This will be the first hunt in the last 10 to 15 years without bait. As a result, biologists expect that deer will be better distributed, according to natural food availability. Hunters will need to scout for natural foods and natural travel routes.

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West Central Region

By Robert Michelson, West Central Region wildlife biologist (715) 839-3736

Thanks to an extremely mild winter and excellent fawn recruitment, deer will be plentiful in the West Central region this year. Even though this region will have only six deer management units in Zone T this year (there were 18 Zone T units in the region in 2001), all of the region's 33 deer management units are at or above goals. In the units that don't have a Zone T season, ample antlerless permits will be available to assure that the opportunity is there for an adequate antlerless harvest.

Because there will be a late opener this year, the weather should be more conducive to deer hunting than it has been for the last couple of years. Bucks will be at the tail end of the rut, which may make them less vulnerable because of less natural movement.

Northeast Region

By Tom Bahti, DNR Northeast Region wildlife biologist - (920) 492-5827

The DNR Northeast Region has lots of deer again this year. Last winter had winter severity indexes (a rating based on temperatures and snow depth) only in the single digits – meaning the winter was quite mild – across northern Marinette and Oconto counties. These were some of the lowest indexes recorded in recent history.

With the mild winter, antler growth should again be excellent, as it has been for the past two to three years. All DMUs except units 45, 54A and 65A are well above prescribed management population goals, and substantial antlerless kills are needed to lower populations to management goal levels. Sixteen of the 25 DMUs in the region are included in this year's T-zone season framework, and the opportunities to take antlerless deer are excellent.

Expanded gun and archery hunting opportunities are also available in metro deer management unit 64M, as regulations have been standardized for all metro units in the state. The late opening date for the gun season (Nov. 23 this year vs. Nov. 17 in 2001) may impact buck activity somewhat, as the rut should be over by the opener this year.

South Central Region

By Carl Batha, DNR South Central Region wildlife biologist

The DNR South Central Region is entering uncharted territory going into the 2002 deer season this fall. The discovery of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in part of Unit 70A has had a profound impact on the deer season structure for most of the region. Only DMUs 68B, 73D, 76A and parts of 54B, 70G, 71, 73B, and 77A will experience the traditional nine-day deer hunt. The balance of the region will experience greatly expanded hunting opportunity as the state tries to eradicate CWD.

Hunters should pay close attention to the season structure and boundaries in the CWD Intensive Harvest Zone and the CWD Management Zone. DMUs 54B, 70G, 71, 73B, and 77A are split with new boundaries identifying that part of the unit in the CWD Management Zone. The season structure and regulations in both Zones are quite different from anything hunters have experienced in the past.

This is an extremely challenging time for everyone involved in trying to stop CWD in Wisconsin. Now, more than ever before, there needs to be a strong partnership between landowners and hunters in trying to stop CWD in its tracks here in Wisconsin. Wildlife biologists and other state officials realize that not everyone is convinced the aggressive approach is the way to combat this disease. But we want to be able to look back in five years and say we tried everything we could to stop the disease here in Wisconsin. We do believe we can be successful, but our success absolutely depends on landowners and hunters working together to kill deer in very large numbers in this area this fall.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Carl Batha - (608) 275-3248

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Southeast Region

By Jim McNelly, DNR Southeast Region wildlife biologist (414) 263-8710

Deer populations are highly variable in this part of the state due to the variety of habitat conditions and hunting pressure. Hunting pressure is generally high on all public lands and many private landowners restrict hunting to friends and relatives. Those hunters wishing to hunt on lands in this region are encouraged to get out and meet landowners to get permission to hunt and scout well before the season. Hunters should always check with local township and village offices to see if there are any changes in firearm or archery equipment safety ordinances.

The anticipated deer harvest within the region will likely be slightly higher than the past year due to a very mild winter, modest increases in the deer population, and increased bonus permits. Increased numbers of yearling deer and fawns have been seen over much of the region. Bonus permits for 2002 generally exceed the numbers of applicants from 2001.

Deer hunters are reminded that the boundary line for DMU 69 changed in 2001 and now includes parts of Manitowoc, Calumet, Fond du Lac, Dodge, and especially Sheboygan, Washington, and Ozaukee counties. Deer numbers in this unit should be similar to last year.

Boundary changes in 2001 also affected DMU 77M, which now includes parts of Sheboygan, Ozaukee, Washington, Waukesha, Milwaukee Racine and Kenosha counties. The more liberal season in Unit 77 M requires that archers and small game hunters wear blaze orange clothing during the Oct. 26 Youth Hunt, the Nov. 23 – Dec. 1 gun deer season, and the special Dec. 2 - 11 metro area deer gun and muzzleloader hunts. Archers are also reminded of the special extended season and the Jan. 31 closing for DMU 77 M.

Deer populations in DMUs 68B, 77 B and 77C are slightly higher than last year, and the number of bonus permits exceeded the number of 2001 bonus permit applicants. The availability of bonus permits should increase harvest numbers. These units are primarily private land and hunters should seek permission for access well before the deer season.

Deer hunting in DMU 77D (Loew Lake Unit) is restricted to archers and up to 40 muzzleloader deer hunters who receive a unit 77D hunter's choice permit. Zone T permits are not valid this year on the Loew Lake Unit for archery or muzzleloader deer hunting. Check with the Pike Lake DNR office for local rules, maps and restrictions (262) 670-3400.

Deer Hunting Season Dates

Archery

Early season Sept.14 - Nov.21

Late season Dec.2 - Jan. 3

Note: Archery Harvest in all Zone T units is restricted to antlerless deer from Oct. 24 – 27.

Archery harvest in Zone T units south of Hwy. 8 is also restricted to antlerless deer from Dec. 12 - 15. Zone T units north of Hwy. 8 will not participate in the December firearm hunt. Normal archery rules and regulations apply to these units.

Gun

Early Zone T: Oct.24 - 27 (antlerless only for archery and firearm)

Youth hunt: Oct. 26 (antlerless only for firearm)

Regular gun: Nov.23 - Dec.1

Late Zone T: Dec.12 –15 (antlerless only for archery and firearm)

Muzzleloader: Dec.2 - Dec.11

Chronic Wasting Disease Zones

Intensive Harvest Zone:

Gun: Oct. 24 – Jan. 31

Archery: Sept. 14 – Jan. 31

Management Zone:

Gun: Oct. 24 – 27, Nov. 23 – Dec. 15, and Dec. 21 – Jan. 3

Archery: Sept. 14 – Jan. 3

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Chronic wasting disease zone special regulations

All Deer Management Units or portions of units in the chronic wasting disease (CWD) zones will be under an “earn-a-buck” season framework. In order to provide the most flexibility and opportunity in the CWD zones, the earn-a-buck framework offers two options for earning and harvesting a buck. Also hunters may earn the ability to harvest a buck with each antlerless deer harvested and tagged.

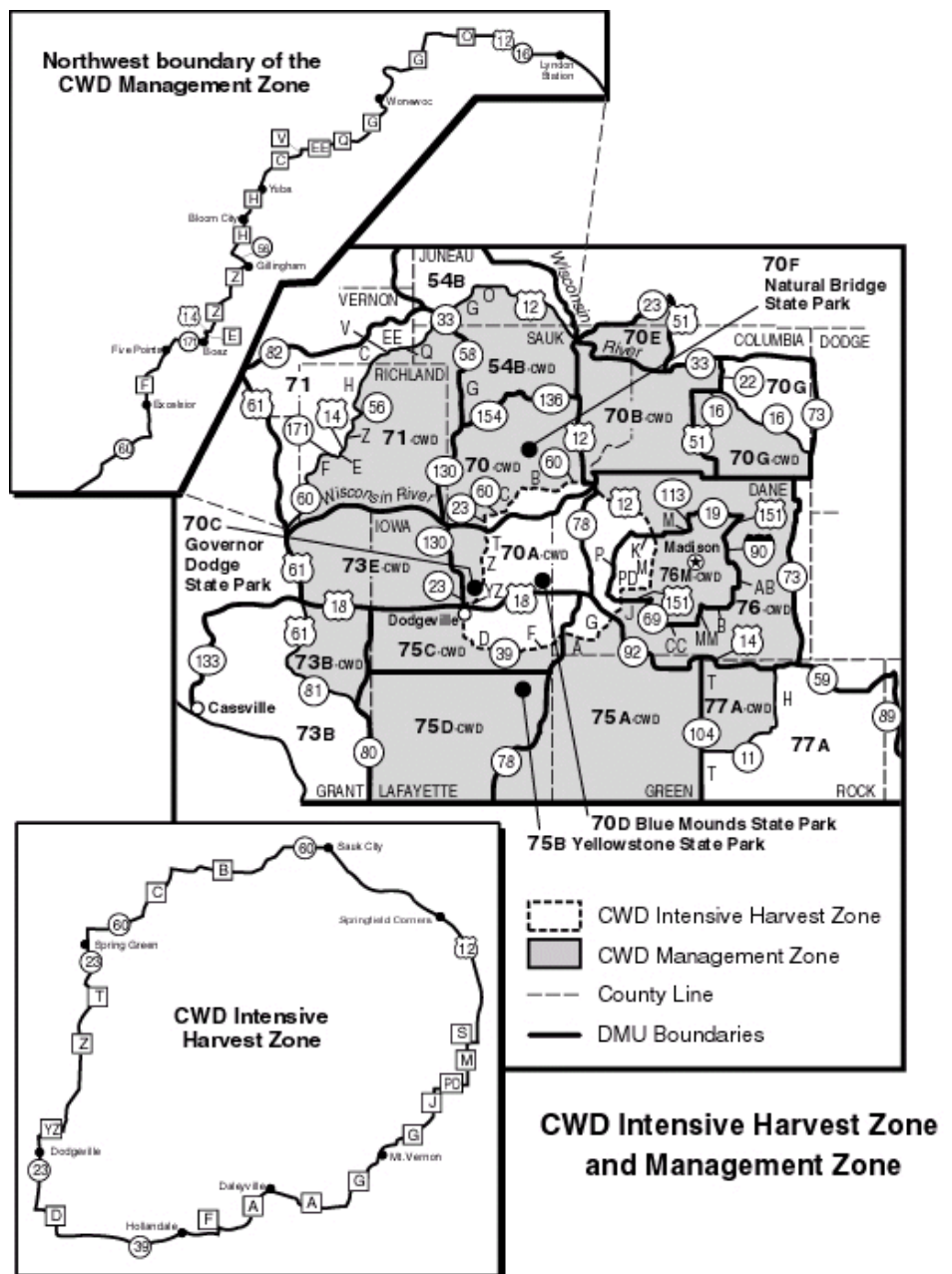
In the CWD Intensive Harvest and Management Zones a valid gun or archery deer carcass tag, Zone T antlerless permit and special CWD earn-a-buck permits are valid for tagging antlerless deer. Hunter’s Choice and unit specific non-CWD Bonus antlerless permits are not valid in these zones. Hunters may obtain up to four free CWD earn-a-buck permits per day, which will be available at DNR service centers and license vendors. The first option is for hunters harvesting antlerless deer to tag it with a gun or archery carcass tag, Zone T, or earn-a-buck permit. They will then receive a CWD buck permit upon registration of the antlerless deer.

The second option, for hunters who wish to remain in the field, is to legally harvest and tag the antlerless deer with an archery or gun carcass tag, Zone T, or Earn-a-Buck permit. A hunter may then use one of these tags to harvest a buck as long as the antlerless deer that authorizes the harvesting of a buck accompanies the buck until it is registered.

Hunters who plan to hunt in a CWD zone should check the special “2002 Wisconsin Regulations Related to Chronic Wasting Disease” for more information on rules and regulations in these zones.

All hunters who hunt in this zone – including archery, small game and turkey, but excluding waterfowl hunters– are required to wear blaze orange clothing when hunting in the CWD zones.

Blue Mounds State Park located in the CWD Intensive Harvest Zone and Governor Dodge, Mirror Lake, Devils Lake, Yellowstone, Rocky Arbor, Natural Bridge and Cadiz Springs state parks located in the CWD Management Zone will also have extended firearm and archery hunts. Hunters planning on hunting in one of these parks must possess a state park permit which lists season dates and park hunting regulations. Park permits will be available at the state park office or DNR service centers.



Feeding and baiting prohibited to help control CWD

MADISON – Hunters participating in this fall’s whited-tail deer seasons in Wisconsin will be prohibited from using bait to attract deer. The prohibition, which applies to archery and gun hunters, and even to non-hunters who just feed deer – is aimed at controlling the spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in Wisconsin.

As of July 3, 2002, it became illegal to feed or bait deer in Wisconsin. Prohibiting feeding and baiting is a part of the state’s multi-prong effort to control CWD and reduce the chance that it will become established in new areas of Wisconsin, state wildlife officials say.

“This restriction is viewed by CWD experts to be critical to controlling this fatal, contagious disease of deer,” said Bill Vander Zouwen, chief of Department of Natural Resources wildlife and landscape ecology section.

“Any practice that concentrates deer – including baiting and feeding – is likely to increase the spread of CWD.”

An abnormal protein called a prion causes the disease, which has been found in deer in western Dane and eastern Iowa counties. This disease can spread from deer to deer directly and through a contaminated environment created by concentrating diseased deer.

Deer baiting, legal in Wisconsin until now, is the practice of putting out food that will attract deer for the purpose of shooting the deer during legal hunting seasons.

Under the rule, baiting is prohibited. What this means is any bait used to attract deer for hunting is prohibited. This includes mineral blocks and supplements, but does not effect the use of liquid scents, such as doe urine. Liquid scents are defined as any nonsolid material except honey that takes the shape of the container at 70 degrees. Any amount of liquid scent is allowed while hunting as long as it is not used to feed wild animals, such as molasses.

DNR research has found that about 40 percent of bowhunters and 17 percent of gun hunters use bait, respectively.

“The difference in success rates among gun hunters with and without bait is negligible,” Vander Zouwen said. “The difference in success rates for archers is greater, but the overall impact of hunting without bait is expected to be minor. Some people even argue that eliminating bait and feed will make deer more vulnerable to hunting by changing the distribution, movement distances, and daytime activity of deer.”

Bear hunters and dog trainers can continue to use bait, but the bait must be placed in a hole in the ground, a stump, or a hollow log and covered by rocks or logs so that deer cannot access the bait. Bait placed for this purpose can only be used between April 15 and the end of the bear harvest season. In addition, to hunt over or train dogs off a bait site, the individual must possess a Class A or Class B bear permit.

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Deer feeding is defined as placing quantities of food out to attract deer for purposes other than hunting, such as wildlife viewing. Under the authority of this emergency rule, feeding deer is prohibited. However, there are exceptions to allow the feeding of small mammals (squirrels and rabbits) and birds.

People can continue to feed birds and small mammals as long as they place the food within 50 yards of homes or work places in feeding devices or structures that make the feed unavailable to deer either by design, physical barrier such as a fence, or height above the ground.

People can also continue to hand-feed animals other than deer if they place the food no more than 30 feet away and make a reasonable attempt to remove unused food when they leave the feeding site.

Placement of plain water is not considered feed or bait and is not regulated.

Food plots, normal agricultural practices and gardens are not regulated by this rule. "The disease risks associated with feeding sites are different from food plots in that feeding sites have food repeatedly placed in the same spot," Vander Zouwen said.

While wildlife officials acknowledge that CWD could spread with or without baiting, they maintain it would spread faster with baiting and feeding, as these practices could bring healthy deer together with diseased deer. And, they add, even small amounts of bait and feed appear to present a disease risk.

"A study in Michigan found that 5 gallons of bait actually had more nose-to-nose contacts among deer than larger piles of bait," Vander Zouwen said. "And even a small amount of feed can attract many deer. For example, one Wisconsin resident recently reported observing 35 different deer coming regularly to a 2 gallon feeding site near his house."

Vander Zouwen said officials decided to ban feeding and baiting statewide, instead of just in the infected area because the risk factors that could contribute to the introduction of CWD into the deer herd maybe present statewide.

Violation of these rules could result in civil forfeitures of up to \$300 plus loss of hunting, fishing and trapping privileges for up to three years for deer feeding and up to \$2,091 plus loss of privileges for deer baiting.

Landowners who find that hunters or others illegally placed bait or feed on their property will be responsible for removing it.

Wisconsin is not the only state to ban baiting and feeding. Michigan, Colorado, and Minnesota also prohibit baiting and feeding to reduce the spread of wildlife diseases. "In fact," Vander Zouwen said, "the majority of states do not permit baiting as a hunting practice."

Vander Zouwen noted the baiting and feeding ban was supported by the Wisconsin Conservation Congress Executive Council, Whitetails Unlimited, Wisconsin Bowhunters Association, Wisconsin Deer Hunters Coalition, Wisconsin Deer Hunters Association, and the Quality Deer Management Association.

The current feeding rules will remain in effect until June 30, 2004 unless reauthorized by legislature.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Tom Hauge (608) 266-2193 or

Bill Vander Zouwen 608-266-8840

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State plans to test 500 deer per county for CWD this fall

With test from CWD zones, state hopes to test up to 50,000 deer

MADISON – State wildlife officials plan to test between 40,000 to 50,000 white-tailed deer killed during this fall’s hunting season for chronic wasting disease. Wildlife officials plan to collect samples from 500 deer from each county of the state, 500 samples from each Deer Management Unit surrounding the CWD intensive harvest zone, and samples from all deer shot in the intensive harvest zone, which is located mostly in western Dane and eastern Iowa counties.

The goals of testing 500 deer from each county is to determine if the disease is present elsewhere in Wisconsin and also to give hunters a high degree of assurance of the absence or presence of the disease in the area where they hunt, state officials say. However, they caution hunters that samples will not necessarily be taken from each deer brought into a registration station.

“The fact is, on-demand testing simply won’t be available for hunters this fall, says Tom Hauge, chief of the DNR Bureau of Wildlife Management. “But this plan will tell hunters and citizens with 99 percent certainty that the disease does or doesn’t exist in the deer population in a given county. We hope that this level of assurance will reduce some of the anxiety people may have regarding venison and the health of the deer herd in Wisconsin.”

Hunters who are able to submit samples for testing will be able to access a confidential CWD testing results site via an Internet site or 1-800 telephone number. Information on how to access the service will be given at the time of sampling. Wildlife officials point out that it could take up to six months for all sample results to be received.

Since discovery of chronic wasting disease in Wisconsin in February 2002, wildlife biologists, veterinarians and epidemiologists have raced to define the extent of this fatal disease of deer and elk and to formulate plans to eradicate it.

Testing will take a tiered approach with the most intensive testing taking place within the CWD intensive harvest zone where every deer harvested during the special summer landowner shooting periods and during the October through January gun hunt will be sampled.

A second tier will test approximately 500 deer over one year of age from each deer management unit in the larger CWD management zone, which extends about 40 miles out from the center of the infection. Sampling in this zone may begin with the early archery season but will be heaviest in October and November. The objective with this sampling effort is to establish a baseline for later comparison to see if the infection is spreading outward.

In the third tier, approximately 500 deer will be tested for CWD from the remaining counties in the state. Some counties, where deer harvests are traditionally light, will be lumped together for the 500 deer sample. Deer heads will be removed for sampling at selected registration/sampling stations. Some stations will be sampled during the Oct. 24-27 Zone T hunt (where applicable) and some will be staffed during the November opening weekend.

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County-level collection stations will be identified in the next several weeks and will be publicized. Plans are being worked out for sampling trophy bucks shot in the intensive harvest zone so hunters can keep the heads for taxidermy. It will not be possible to provide special tissue collection services for trophy bucks outside of the intensive harvest zone. In these areas, the entire head must be donated.

Not every hunter will have an opportunity to volunteer a tissue sample from his or her deer. Wildlife officials will be seeking to collect samples from deer from throughout the county to help ensure a diverse sample. This will help insure the testing gives a high degree of confidence in the overall results.

“The 500 deer per county/DMU number was not pulled out of the air,” said Hauge. “This sampling level will give 99 percent probability that we will detect CWD in an area even if only one percent of the deer in that area are infected.”

Chronic wasting disease is one of a family of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies or TSEs. Caused by an aberrant protein, called a prion, the ultimate result of the disease is deterioration of the victim’s brain and death. Some forms of the disease have been known for centuries in agriculture, such as scrapie, which is found in sheep. Other forms for as little as 30 or so years, such as CWD. A human form exists too in the form of Cruetzfield-Jakob disease (CJD) and new variant Cruetzfield-Jakob disease (nvCJD).

There is much to be learned about chronic wasting disease. Many of the questions will need to be answered by human medical researchers and epidemiologists. Wildlife and animal health specialists will investigate others. In addition to mapping out where CWD exists in Wisconsin’s deer herd, an opportunity exists to learn a great deal more about the dynamics of the disease; knowledge that could prove invaluable in future years.

The stakeholders in this multiple riddle are the citizens of Wisconsin. Those stakeholders most closely tied to the whitetail – hunters, tourism, agriculture and business – are hoping for fast answers. One of the most widely held hopes is that every hunter wishing to could have his or her kill tested for the disease. This just isn’t possible at this time according to wildlife health officials at the federal and state levels.

For more information on CWD, see the Department of Natural Resource’s Web site at <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us>> and click on the link for chronic wasting disease. For questions regarding captive deer and elk contact the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. For questions on human health and disease contact the Department of Health and Family Services.

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A chronology of Wisconsin deer hunting from closed seasons to antlerless permits

FITCHBURG, Wis. – Wisconsin has a long and storied tradition of regulated gun deer hunting, going back to 1851. There have been many changes over the years, but none more dramatic as those experienced by hunters during the 1990's and early twenty-first century.

- 1834 – Lafayette County, first reported crop damage by deer.
- 1851 – First closed season for deer, Feb. 1 – June 30; Indians permitted to hunt anytime.
- 1876 – Hunting with dogs prohibited statewide.
- 1887 – Two game wardens appointed by governor at a monthly salary of \$50; night hunting prohibited statewide.
- 1888 – Game laws published in pamphlet form.
- 1890 – First chief warden appointed.
- 1892 – Lawful to kill any dog running or hunting deer.
- 1895 – Sheboygan first county closed to deer hunting; deer cannot be transported unless accompanied by hunter; last October deer season in state.
- 1897 – First bag limit for deer, two per season; resident license costs \$1, nonresident license costs \$30; estimated license sales total 12,000.
- 1900 – Twelve hunters killed by firearms.
- 1903 – Estimated 78,164 licenses sold.
- 1905 – Salt licks prohibited.
- 1909 – Season 20 days long, limit one deer; first civil service exam given on a competitive basis for prospective wardens.
- 1914 – Twenty-four hunters killed, 26 injured; license sales at 155,000
- 1915 – First buck only season.
- 1917 – Shining deer illegal while possessing a firearm; Conservation Commission delegated some powers related to deer season, but legislature retains authority to set seasons; deer tags (paper) required for the first time...they cost 10 cents.
- 1919 – Estimated kill is 25,152.
- 1920 – First use of metal deer tags...they cost 10 cents.
- 1921 – Wardens are instructed that "all deer found in possession...with horns less than three inches in length, is a fawn and should be confiscated."
- 1924 – Estimated kill is 7000.
- 1925 – Legislature passes law closing deer season in alternate years.
- 1927 – No open season.
- 1928 – Deer hunters required to wear official conservation button while hunting; Game Division formed with Conservation Department; estimated kill is 17,000 with 69,049 deer tags sold.
- 1929 – No open season.
- 1930 – Estimated kill is 23,000 with 70,284 deer tags sold.
- 1931 – No open season.
- 1932 – Deer tag price is raised to \$1; estimated kill is 36,009 with 70,245 deer tags sold.
- 1933 – No open season; Conservation Congress, an advisory group representing public opinion registered at annual county hearings, begins to assist the Conservation Commission in establishing a deer management policy.
- 1934 – First bow deer season; estimated gun kill is 21,251 with 83,939 deer tags sold.
- 1935 – No open season.
- 1937 – Shortest deer season on record, three days.
- 1938 – Use of .22 rifle and .410 shotgun prohibited.

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- 1939 – Licensed children between ages 12 and 16 must be accompanied by parent or guardian; buckshot prohibited statewide.
- 1941 – Deer predators rare, timber wolves nearing extinction; estimated gun kill is 40,403 with 124,305 deer tags sold.
- 1942 – Back tags required while deer hunting.
- 1943 – First doe and fawn season in 24 years.
- 1945 – First year of 'shotgun only' counties; wearing red clothing required while hunting deer.
- 1950 – First 'any deer' season since 1919; estimated gun kill is 167,911 with 312,570 deer tags sold.
- 1951 – Deer hunting license and tag cost \$2.50; orange clothing now included under red clothing law; Wisconsin leads nation in whitetail deer kill for third consecutive year.
- 1953 – First season gun deer hunters required to register deer at checking station.
- 1954 – Two-thirds of bucks harvested are less than three years old; portions of Walworth and Waukesha Counties and all of Jefferson County open for the first time since 1906.
- 1956 – 100th established gun deer season; registered gun kill is 35,562 with 294,645 deer tags sold.
- 1957 – Legislature authorizes party permit.
- 1958 – Longest deer season since 1916, 16 days; Rock County open for the first time since 1906; first harvest by deer management unit (in northwest and northeast only); registered gun kill is 95,234, of which 44,987 taken by party permit; 335,866 deer tags and 58,348 party permits sold, respectively.
- 1959 – First statewide deer registration by unit; Game Management Division of Conservation Department assumes responsibility for coordinating the state's deer program; first open season in Kenosha County since 1906.
- 1960 – Hunter not permitted to buy a license after opening day of gun season; Green and Racine Counties open for the first time since 1906; all counties now open except Milwaukee; registered gun kill is 61,005, of which 25,515 taken by party permit; 338,208 deer tags and 47,522 party permits sold, respectively.
- 1961 – Resident big game license increased from \$4 to \$5; hunters required to transport deer openly while driving to registration station.
- 1962 – Deer population above 400,000
- 1963 – First year of quota party permits in eight management units; assassination of President Kennedy lessens hunting pressure.
- 1964 – Party permit quota extended to 32 management units.
- 1967 – Hunter Safety Education Program begins.
- 1970 – Registered gun kill is 72,844 with 501,799 licenses sold; 13 hunters killed.
- 1973 – No deer season fatalities.
- 1978 – Record registered gun kill is 150,845 with 644,594 licenses sold.
- 1980 – Blaze orange clothing required; first season of Hunter's Choice permit; new law prohibits shining wild animals from 10pm to 7pm, Sept. 15 – Dec. 31; coyote season closed in northern management units to protect nascent wolf population.
- 1981 – Record registered deer kill of 166,673 with 629,034 licenses sold.
- 1982 – Another record registered gun kill of 182,715 with 637,320 licenses sold; three deer season fatalities.
- 1983 – Harvest continues to rise with another record registered gun kill of 197,600 with 649,972 licenses sold; experimental antlerless deer hunt in six southern management units to relieve crop damage.
- 1984 – Big jump in registered kill, fourth record harvest in a row of 255,726 with license sales totaling 657,969; handgun deer hunting allowed in shotgun areas; group hunting legalized.
- 1985 – Fifth consecutive record kill of 274,302 with 670,329 licenses sold; deer season extended in 21 management units; legislature further strengthens road hunting restrictions.
- 1986 – Gun deer season now nine days statewide; landowner preference program begins for Hunter's Choice permits.
- 1987 – First year of bonus antlerless permits; seven fatalities and 46 hunting accidents.
- 1988 – Handguns permitted statewide.

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- 1989 – Record registered harvest of 310,192 with 662,280 licenses sold; pre-hunt herd estimate of 1.15 million deer; two fatalities and 37 hunting accidents.
- 1990 – Another record kill of 350,040, including 209,005 antlerless deer; record license sales of 671,890; pre-hunt herd estimate of 1.3 million deer; season extended for seven days in 67 management units.
- 1991 – Third consecutive year of record harvest, 352,330; hunters allowed to buy more than one antlerless permit; season extended to 72 management units, mostly in the north; first year of separate, seven-day muzzleloader season.
- 1992 – Though kill fourth highest on record, 288,820, many hunters voice discontent over lack of success and claim DNR raised expectations by pre-hunt harvest prediction of around 370,000; hunters allowed to apply for bonus antlerless permits in more than one unit; Natural Resources Board approves Secretary's recommendation to keep the gun season at nine days; new metro management units established around La Crosse, Madison and Milwaukee.
- 1993 – Harvest drops to 217, 584, including 100,977 antlerless deer; pre-hunt herd population at 1 million with many units well below prescribed goals; 34 units, mainly in the north, designated as buck-only units; one fatality, 17 hunting accidents.
- 1994 – Hunters Choice permit availability jumps to 177,340 from 103,140 in 1993; six northwest management units remain buck only; herd beginning to build-up in southern agricultural range.
- 1995 – Harvest totals 398,002, a new state record; 32 accidents, one fatal; over 577,000 antlerless permits available with 414,000 plus applicants with 163,000 bonus permits offered to hunters; for the first time hunters can use their bonus or Hunter's Choice permits in either the gun, bow or muzzleloader seasons.
- 1996 – 'Earn a Buck' requirement placed on hunters in 19 deer management units situated in agricultural range where existing deer seasons and permit systems aren't controlling herd growth; special four-day antlerless only season, state's first October hunt since 1897, takes place in 19 'Earn a Buck' units, resulting in a kill of 24,954 deer.
- 1997 – 'Earn a Buck' provision scuttled; early Zone T season in seven management units and three state parks results in over 7000 deer killed; the safest gun season even with one fatality and 10 accidents.
- 1998 – An early October gun season for third year in a row held in one management unit, 67A; harvest of 332,254 is fifth highest; accidents total 19 with two fatalities; most units in all regions of the state estimated to be above prescribed goals due to the mild winter of 1997-98.
- 1999 – Early antlerless Zone T deer season held in seven mainly east-central management units and one state park; early archery season is extended through Nov. 18 in Zone T units; pre-hunt herd estimate is 1.5 to 1.6 million deer; 33 management units in the central and southern part of the state are designated 'watch unit's that are above population goals and may be designated as Zone T units next year if quota numbers aren't filled; resident deer license costs \$20; non-resident license costs \$135; record harvest of 402,204 deer.
- 2000 – Early four-day Zone T antlerless hunts produces kill of 66,417 deer; 97 of the state's 132 deer management units listed as Zone T; two free antlerless permits given to all hunters buying deer-related licenses; hunters kill a record 528,494 deer during the early antlerless only, nine-day, muzzleloader and late antlerless only gun seasons; nine-day gun harvest totals a record 442,581 (170,865 antlered, 271,573 antlerless); 694,957 licensed gun hunters.
- 2001 – Wisconsin's pre-hunt population estimated at 1.5 million deer; free antlerless permit given to all hunters buying deer-related licenses; 67 deer management units and nine state parks designated as Zone T; October and December four-day, Zone T antlerless hunts results in kill of 58,107 deer; nine-day gun harvest is the state's fifth largest, totaling 361,264 (141,942 antlered, 219,260 antlerless); chronic wasting disease (CWD) later identified in three deer harvested in the Dane County Town of Vermont.
- 2002 – The 151st deer season; herd estimate at 1.6 million animals; DNR plans to sample about 50,000 deer during the early Zone T antlerless hunt (oct. 24-27) and opening weekend (Nov. 23-24) of the nine-day gun season to determine if CWD is present anywhere else in the state besides the 374 square mile Eradication Zone in southwest Wisconsin; expanded hunting opportunities set-up in the CWD Management Zone and a gun deer season slated for Oct. 24 to Jan. 31 in the CWD Eradication Zone; Zone T hunts scheduled for 25 deer management units. Also in an effort to control the spread of the disease, the state Natural Resources Board banned baiting or feeding of deer in the state until at least June 2004.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Greg Matthews, Regional Public Affairs Manager,
Fitchburg: (608) 275-3317

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2002 bear season forecast

The 2002 Wisconsin black bear population is estimated at 13,000 animals. Black bears continue to expand their range into new reaches of central and southern Wisconsin and sightings are becoming a more common occurrence throughout the state.

This year the department issued 4,985 Class A bear permits and set a harvest goal of 2,450 animals. The applicant pool for harvest permits has risen steadily over the years and there now appears to be a consistent number of applicants approximating 54,000 each year. Last year, hunters harvested 2,986 bears with the highest harvests occurring in Bayfield, Price, and Sawyer counties.

Winter den surveys showed that the bears went into the winter in excellent shape, reflecting the abundant acorn crop and abundance of natural foods last fall. Litter sizes (another measure of bear health) showed healthy litters averaging three cubs. Wildlife staff have received many reports of bears in areas where they have not been noticed in the past, an indication that young animals are looking for places to call home.

Summer food supplies look good as there seems to be a bumper crop of berries and lots of ants and tent caterpillars. Dog trainers indicate they're having no problem in attracting bears to baits (which have to be inaccessible to deer because of the new ban on feeding of deer) and in a lot of cases have multiple bear on them.

Hunters are reminded that it is illegal to shoot a sow that is accompanied by cubs of the year or cubs. A cub is defined as a bear that is shorter than 42 inches measured from tip of nose to base of tail. Hunters who are concerned about distinguishing a cub from an adult bear should consider laying a 42 inch log next to their bait to assist in determining size.

Hunters should also be aware of new baiting laws that restrict the way in which they put out bait. The bait has to be put out in a way that makes it inaccessible to deer (which means it has to be put in a capped stump or log or a hole in the ground covered with logs or rocks).

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DNR Northern Region bear forecast

By Mike Zeckmeister – DNR Northern Region wildlife biologist

Bear populations throughout the DNR Northern Region remain extremely productive. The results from the late spring-early summer bear bait survey indicate a high presence of bear throughout the north. Bear numbers in zone A1 are approximately 27 percent above goal and are near goals in zones A and B. The state has been issuing more permits for the past several years, trying to get the bear population back to goal. Permit levels have dropped in zones A and B to maintain a healthy black bear population at goals. Habitat conditions, abundant food supplies, and a healthy bear population should result in excellent hunting opportunities for the upcoming bear season in northern Wisconsin.

DNR Northeast Region bear forecast

By Tom Bahti, Northeast Region wildlife biologist

The opportunity to harvest a quality bear should be available to many hunters in the DNR Northeast Region this year. Two indicators of a healthy bear population are bait station surveys and the compilation of nuisance complaints. This summer produced a higher number of bait station visits than in prior years and more frequent nuisance complaints from throughout the region. Most bears have traditionally been harvested in Marinette and Oconto counties but the population has expanded in recent years throughout portions either bordering or included within zone C. Borderline areas along the division of zones B and C have produced some of the bigger bears taken in the region and that trend looks to continue this year. The berry crop throughout the area has been similar to last year and the steady availability of acorns has benefited the bear population throughout the region.

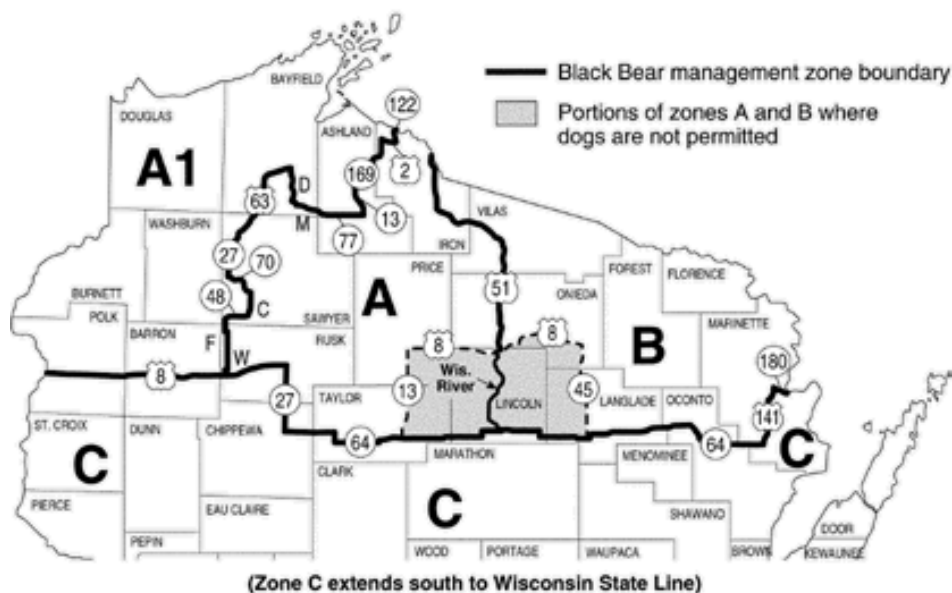
DNR West Central Region bear forecast

By Mike Gappa, West Central Region wildlife biologist

The bear population in the southern two thirds of Wisconsin (commonly referred to as zone C) has grown these past few years to a point where biologists have now set the population goal for the zone at 1,200 bears. This is an increase of 400 bears from previous year's goals.

Of the state's four bear management zones, the DNR West Central Region falls mostly in zone C. Only the northeast corner of Chippewa County is in zone A. Zone C is a bait only hunting zone – no dog hunting is allowed – and the season runs from Sept.4 to Oct.8. The counties in the West Central Region that typically harvest the most bears are Marathon, Chippewa and Clark. There will be 730 harvest permits issued for zone C this year, which based on previous hunter success rates, should result in a harvest of 270 bears. In 2001, 289 bears were harvested with 715 permits for a hunter success rate of 40 percent.

Bear Hunting Management Zones



Upland game forecast

By Keith Warnke, DNR upland game ecologist

Note: Small game and turkey hunters who will be hunting in the chronic wasting disease (CWD) management zones this fall are subject to blaze orange clothing requirements. See the CWD special regulations for details.

Ruffed Grouse

The 2002 ruffed grouse spring drumming survey shows a 16 percent decrease in the number of drumming grouse heard during roadside surveys from last year's surveys. All regions of the state showed a decrease. Productivity and recruitment may be higher than last year due to the relatively mild weather this spring.

Wisconsin's ruffed grouse population exhibited an upward trend up to 1999 when it hit its peak. The population is now on the downward trend of its cycle. Hunters may expect reduced grouse in the bag, but these are great years to scout new hunting areas. Hunters will not find uniform numbers of grouse across the landscape. They will need to seek good habitat for ruffed grouse hunting this year and may have to move around to find the pockets that contain good numbers of birds. Ruffed grouse use a variety of habitat types, but young, early successional forest types are most important when trying to find a good grouse hunting location.

The ruffed grouse season opens on Sept. 14 in the northern and western zone and on Oct. 19 in the eastern zone. The season closes on Dec. 31 and Jan. 31 in the northern and western zones, respectively. It closes on Dec. 8 in the eastern zone. The bag and possession limits are five and 10, respectively, in the northern and western zones and two and four in the eastern zone.

Sharp-tailed grouse

Individual permits are required to hunt sharp-tailed grouse in Wisconsin. Permits are issued in certain Deer Management Units (DMUs) and the number of permits available is based on spring population surveys conducted by wildlife managers in April. The total number of permits available for the 2002 season is 1,050. Those units open in 2002 for sharp-tailed grouse hunting include DMUS 2, 8, 9, and 10.

Sharp-tailed grouse dancing ground surveys indicated a slight increase in this year's population estimate compared to last year. The overall population has been on a gradual decline that started in 1999. Sharptails require specific habitat for dancing grounds, nesting areas, brood areas, and wintering sites. This habitat ranges from prairie with grasses and forbs; to brush prairie with small, low shrubs and open woodland; to woodlands with young forests containing coniferous trees like jack pine and deciduous hardwoods like aspen. The primary component limiting sharp-tailed grouse populations in Wisconsin is lack of expansive, open prairie and brush-prairie habitats.

The 2002 season will take place Oct. 19- Nov. 10.

Ring-Necked Pheasant

Preliminary pheasant crowing counts indicate increased wild pheasant populations statewide. The mild weather this past winter and spring are expected to have a positive effect on productivity this year. Brood survey information will not be available until late summer.

Areas within the pheasant management counties that contain adequate winter cover (cattail and shrub-carr marshes, and thick switch grass fields) and have more than 5 percent of the landscape in idle grassland will have the highest pheasant densities. Research has shown that wetlands are one of the most important year-round cover types for pheasants in Wisconsin. Over the long-term throughout the Midwest, pheasant populations have shown a decline. Changes in pheasant populations have coincided with changing agriculture and land use patterns. Pheasants once relied on small grain and hay fields for nesting and brood rearing. These areas are now being replaced with larger row crops of corn and soybeans. It will be important for hunters to identify areas with high quality habitat and concentrate hunting efforts in that area.

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A pheasant stamp is required to hunt pheasants in pheasant management zones. Pheasant hunting opens statewide on Oct. 19 at noon and closes on Dec. 31. From Oct. 19-20, the daily bag limit is one cock and possession limit is two. For the remainder of the season the daily bag limit is two cocks and the possession limit is four. Some public hunting grounds have both hen and cock pheasant hunting (requires free permits and tags) and /or 2 p.m. closure times. See the Special Pheasant pamphlet for details.

DNR wildlife staff will again stock approximately 72 public hunting grounds with at least 55,000 game farm pheasants to provide hunting opportunity. Hunters need to check the pheasant hunting regulations and the general hunting regulations to find out in which counties a pheasant stamp is required and which public hunting grounds have a 2 p.m. closure and/or allow hen pheasant hunting.

Stocking and hunting hen pheasants on certain properties increases the effective use of surplus hen chicks produced by the State Game Farm and provides additional pheasant hunting opportunities. Hen hunting properties were selected because they had no wild hens on or near them. It is illegal to shoot hen pheasants anywhere else in Wisconsin, except on licensed game farms.

Wild Turkey

There were 74,650 permits available for the 2002 fall turkey hunting season, up from 71,601 permits for the 2001 fall season. The statewide spring 2002 harvest reached a record high of 39,336. Early population estimates indicate another excellent year for turkey hunting. Turkey broods have been seen throughout the turkey management zones.

The Wisconsin turkey population now extends well into the northern part of the state. Expansion is occurring in part due to statewide mild winters, available habitat, and expanded habitat development and improvement.

During the fall, turkeys spend more than 90 percent of the daylight hours in hardwood habitats. Both brood flocks and adult male flocks make extensive use of areas dominated by oak and hickory. Turkey hunters should monitor the acorn crop in the area they hunt, as the success or failure of acorns will determine where turkeys will be feeding. In years of poor acorn production, turkeys spend proportionately more time in cornfields.

Since most turkey hunting occurs on private land, it is important for hunters to keep landowner relationships a high priority. Landowners in Wisconsin are usually willing to allow hunters to use their land as long as they ask politely for permission to do so.

The 2002 season will take place Oct. 12 through Nov. 10. Bag limit is one turkey of any age or sex per hunting approval notice.

Woodcock

American woodcock singing-ground data collected by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2002 indicates a 21 percent decrease from last year in the number of woodcocks heard displaying in Wisconsin. Long-term trends from this survey indicate a decreasing population and decreasing hunter success in Wisconsin and throughout the service's central management unit, which includes Wisconsin.

The northern region of the state is where hunters will find the most woodcock hunting opportunities. Moist, loamy soils are preferred because a major component of the woodcock diet is earthworms. Woodcock, like ruffed grouse, prefer early successional northern forests composed primarily of young aspen, alder, and spruce along with shrub understory.

Because the woodcock is a migratory bird, woodcock populations and hunting limits are federally regulated. The season will run from Sept. 21 to Nov. 4 and the bag limit is three per day with the possession limit set at six. The typical peak woodcock migration occurs in the second or third week of October. Woodcock hunters must remember that they are required to be HIP (Harvest Information Program) certified and must carry proof of such certification when hunting.

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2002-2003 Fall Furbearer Forecast

By John Olson, DNR furbearer ecologist

Wisconsin is home to a diverse number of furbearer species such as the large weasel family – which includes mink, otter, marten, fisher, skunk and three different types of weasels – the lonely bobcat, the industrious beaver and the exciting canines.

Overall furbearer populations are doing very well, and in some cases have become challenges due to high numbers. The mild winter last year did improve hunting success, but that did not have a significant impact on overall populations. However, severe spring and early summer weather may have had an impact on the state's wildlife, including furbearers.

Raccoon

Wisconsin has large populations of raccoons, with the highest densities in the southern half of the state. Tom Isaac, DNR wildlife biologist for Washington, Ozaukee and northern Milwaukee counties reports that raccoon are very abundant in all counties in a wide variety of habitats – often to nuisance levels. Dave Matheys, wildlife biologist for Vernon County in southwestern Wisconsin reports that raccoon, skunks and opossums are abundant, with most landowners, especially farmers very willing to allow trappers on their land to trap these three critters. Raccoons are found in a wide variety of habitats both rural and urban. Those areas close to a wetland or farmland mosaic have some of the highest populations, with the expansive northern forests being on the lower end of the spectrum.

However, with high populations of raccoons the state has been experiencing localized outbreaks or “pockets” of Canine Distemper Virus (CDV). Currently there are widespread problems with CDV in raccoons. Kerry Beheler, DNR wildlife health specialist says trappers and hunters should take special care with abnormal acting raccoons, because CDV mimics rabies, which is a viral disease fatal to humans and other mammals.

This will be a good year to train young dogs or ask permission to trap on new lands. This is a species where landowner permission to hunt or trap is normally not a problem, but hunters and trappers should still leave ample time to contact landowners and learn from them where best to focus your attention. Mike Gappa, DNR wildlife supervisor from Eau Claire urges trappers and hunters to get permission from the landowner well in advance. The raccoon season opens statewide for residents on Oct. 19, with the exception of the Mississippi River Zone where that season opens with the muskrat and mink season.

Beaver

Interest in this furbearer remains relatively stable, with decent fur prices at the international auctions that are expected to remain strong through the 2002-2003 season. Although the longer seasons have helped to reduce beaver numbers as planned, improved water and lower fur prices could prompt a gradual increase throughout the state. Bruce Kohn, DNR wildlife research specialist from Rhinelander, reports the statewide beaver population estimate is around 80,000 animals. Beaver numbers in southern Wisconsin appear to be stable to increasing. Intensive aerial surveys conducted every three years in northern beaver management zones indicate a stable population of approximately 40,000 beaver in northwestern Wisconsin, known as zone A. In northeastern Wisconsin (zone B), where more intensive management programs exist, the population estimate is approximately 21,000 beavers. According to Pat Beringer, wildlife biologist in La Crosse, the rather unique Mississippi River beaver management zone has experienced a decline in beaver numbers. Since 1996 beaver populations have not shown any signs of ill health from density-dependent wetland diseases such as botulism or tularemia.

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Otter

Current statewide otter populations are at management goals of approximately 13,000 animals, with the 2001-2002 harvest being the second highest on record, with 2,400 animals taken. Although a majority is found in the north, otter numbers in central and southern Wisconsin appear to be increasing. They are now present in many of the state's major river systems of the southwest, namely the Kickapoo, Black, Mississippi and Wisconsin rivers and tributaries.

Otter populations in northeastern Wisconsin appear to be quite healthy according to local wildlife biologists. Most biologists report that otter sightings from sportsmen and DNR field personnel are equal to or higher than recent years. In addition, fish hatchery otter damage claims are up, and these represent a unique opportunity for trappers to work with landowners to remove problem animals. In general, trappers should concentrate efforts in the west-central counties of the DNR Northeast Region, with Marinette, Oconto, Shawano, Menominee, and Waupaca counties historically having the highest otter harvests in the Region. Excellent otter trapping potential exists in the Shioc River, the Embarrass River, the Red River, and the Wolf River system. Additional opportunities can be found along the many trout streams of Waushara and Marquette counties, where numerous state properties make for easy access. Trappers working out of the Fox Valley should find decent otter numbers in the Fox River system and the wetlands of Winnebago and Outagamie Counties. In general, 2002 looks to be a great year for otter trapping.

Lesa Skuldt, DNR assistant furbearer specialist, notes that the otter season is highly regulated, and one of the latest opportunities to harvest wildlife in Wisconsin, with a statewide opening date of Dec. 7, and continuing until March 2, 2003 in the Central and South Zones, and April 30 in the North Zone. Anyone interested in trapping otter must apply by Sept. 10, 2002.

Permits levels will decrease slightly this year due mainly to increased interest and success rates. Skuldt says applicants can expect to receive at least one permit and possibly additional permit(s) depending upon the number of applicants in the zone of choice. Late season otter prices increased with an expected increase in interest by permit holders to spend time after good otter locations, she said.

Fisher

Strong interest in fisher by tribal and state trappers has resulted in more applicants than permits, especially in northwestern Wisconsin. Fisher health is exceptional with no known pathogens threatening them.

There are six fisher management zones in Wisconsin. Zones A through D are located in the northern portion of the state, Zone E is the west central portion, and Zone F includes the remainder of the state. Population densities are highest in those zones open to trapping with a growing population in Zone E and northern portions of Zone F. Zone E was open for harvest last year with a controlled, small harvest. The best opportunities will be in the northern portion of Zone E, namely Chippewa, Clark, Eau Claire and Marathon counties.

This year permit numbers are up slightly and the amount of applications in the zone of choice will determine whether a trapper will receive a permit or an additional preference point. The fisher preference system provides fairness in permit distribution from year to year especially when applications far exceed the amount of available permits. The application deadline is Sept. 10, the same as for otter. The fisher season runs Nov. 1 through Dec. 31.

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Bobcat

Wisconsin is on the northern edge of bobcat range, but with relatively good habitat, mild winters and conservative management, biologists estimate the statewide population is approximately 2,600 animals. Annual harvests average around 220 with a reduced harvest in 2001 of 142. Concern over record harvest success rates – due partially to a lack of snow – resulted in a reduction in permits last year.

Bobcat populations are stable to increasing across forests of northern Wisconsin. Bruce Bacon, DNR wildlife biologist at Mercer reports bobcat sign is as abundant as he's ever seen around Iron County, and public observations of bobcat are up considerably. There has also been an increase in bobcat sightings in southern and southwestern portions of the state. Aaron Buchholz, DNR wildlife biologist out of Wausaukee, suggests that trappers and hunters who receive bobcat harvest permits should look to northern Marinette and Oconto counties as great locations to pursue bobcat in northeastern Wisconsin.

Bobcat populations are also increasing in other Midwestern states with dramatic increases experienced in portions of Kansas, Nebraska, Illinois and Missouri. The season begins on Oct. 19 (only open north of US Highway 64), and continues until Dec. 31, with the number of permits limited. A preference system allows the continuous applicant a bobcat tag about every four to five years. As with fisher and otter, the application deadline for bobcat is Sept. 10, 2002.

As with fisher and otter, bobcat must be tagged at the point of harvest and registered at a DNR facility. At that time, the bobcat carcass, and in some years otter and fisher as well, is collected from the trapper or hunter. From registration and carcass collections DNR biologists gather important management information, such as harvest pressure, overall age structure of the population, reproductive age, and previous litter sizes. In 2002 carcasses will be required from all bobcat and fisher from Zone E.

Coyotes and Foxes

Coyote numbers have expanded throughout southern and western portions of the state and are doing well elsewhere, with the exception of established gray wolf territories. Coyotes have generally moved into more urban and suburban areas while foxes are in more of the rural areas.

Red fox numbers have increased across many areas of the north, with mange and coyote competition reducing numbers in western and southern portions of the state. DNR wildlife biologist Andy Nelson reports that coyotes numbers are strong around the Horicon Marsh area, but that fox were more spotty in Dodge County. Gray fox have fewer cases of mange and appear to be doing well in southern and central Wisconsin.

North of Highway 64, the trapping season for fox and coyote opens with bobcat on Oct. 19. South of Highway 64 the fox and coyote trapping seasons open on Oct. 26. Hunting of coyote is open statewide, year round with the exception of some northern areas closed during the deer firearm seasons. Fox hunting opens with the respective trapping seasons.

One noteworthy item is the gradual increase and expansion of the gray wolf across northern and west-central portions of the state. According to Adrian Wydeven, non-game mammalian ecologist for the DNR, a gradual increase in gray wolf populations across the north, coupled with noteworthy movements of individual animals into southern Wisconsin makes observations of these wild and wonderful canines a real possibility. Biologists are encouraging the public, and especially hunters and trappers who are intimately familiar with their areas of the state, to report observations.

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Muskrat and Mink

Mink and muskrat populations appear to be doing well throughout most of the state, but not at levels experienced in past years. Muskrats appear to be doing well along the Wisconsin river and lower Kickapoo River bottoms. Biologists from southeastern Wisconsin also suggest that mink seem to be abundant on most river systems. On a statewide basis, opportunities to trap these species are good to excellent, as they exist in most areas where permanent water can be found. The season opens for muskrat Oct. 19 in the Northern Zone, Oct. 26 in the Central and Winnebago Zones, and Nov. 2 for the Southern Zone. For mink the opener is identical, with earlier closing dates in each zone.

Furbearer Season Changes

The Mississippi River Zone will be into the third year of a successful change in opening dates. In an effort to allow open-water trapping, many wildlife managers, hunters, trappers and representatives from a variety of organizations developed a new season that begins the second Monday of November (Nov. 11 for 2002), or the day after the duck season ends, whichever occurs first. This earlier opener creates a perfect opportunity for experienced trappers to invite a friend or two along on the trapline and show them the beauty and hard work that's part of this outdoor experience.

Trapping hours will change slightly, allowing trappers more flexibility in tending traps earlier in the day. New trap hours for the 2002 season will be from 4 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Additional trapper responsibilities

Some villages, cities, and towns throughout the state, primarily in urban areas, require special permits and/or have ordinances that restrict trapping, or the discharge of firearms or bows. Check with local town or village offices before hunting or trapping to see if special rules apply. A quality hunting or trapping experience can be found on both public and private lands. Preseason scouting and permission seeking from landowners is critical.

Best Management Practices for Trapping

In a progressive effort to improve the science of furbearer management, the State of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Trappers Association, Wisconsin Conservation Congress and individual trappers have been actively involved in an international effort to develop Best Management Practices for Trapping. This is the largest collective trap research effort ever undertaken anywhere in the world, with the final product being information and suggestions that each state and their trappers can use to improve on animal welfare and trapping in general.

Anyone who would like to learn more about furbearers, trapping history, responsibilities and ethics of the modern-day trapper, should consider taking the trapper education course offered by the department and taught by dedicated volunteer instructors of the Wisconsin Trappers Association. Completion of this 12-hour course is mandatory for anyone interested in becoming a trapper. To locate a current class, contact your local DNR office or check the DNR Web site.

F: John Olson, Furbearer Specialist, Box 220, Park Falls, WI 54552, (715) 762-3204, or Lesa Skuldt, Assistant Furbearer Specialist, at (608)261-6452.

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2002 Migratory Game Bird Hunting Season Forecast

By Scott Walter, acting DNR waterfowl ecologist

Ducks

Each year, wildlife biologists conduct a spring aerial survey to assess duck populations and habitat conditions in the state. This year the survey was flown from April 29-May 10.

Wetland conditions were favorable for nesting ducks this year in Wisconsin. Although fall and winter precipitation levels varied somewhat by region, statewide precipitation levels from October through February were slightly above normal. A wet spring, with precipitation 19 percent above normal statewide, served to fill many shallow wetland basins across the state, and all regions of the state had spring wetland numbers above the long-term averages. Northern regions of the state generally received the most precipitation, and had a greater increase in wetland numbers, than did the southern counties.

The surveys revealed a record breeding duck population in 2002, with more than 913,000 ducks statewide. This represents an increase of 68 percent from 2001, and is 118 percent above the long-term average. The mallard population estimate was 127 percent higher than 2001, and 125 percent above the long-term average. While survey data reveal much annual variation in mallard numbers, an increasing trend is evident since the mid-1980s. The state population averaged 102,000 for the period 1973-1985 and 226,000 for the period 1986-2002. This may reflect a successful harvest strategy, as well as ambitious wetland restoration efforts across the state.

Blue-winged teal increased 27 percent over 2001, and were above the long-term average for the first time in eight years. It is important to note, however, that the duck population estimates in 2002 may have been biased high due to the inclusion of migrant flocks. A period of cold weather in early May might have caused some migrating ducks to remain in the state later than normal, and these ducks may have been counted during the aerial surveys.

Duck production should be above average this year in Wisconsin. Relatively dry conditions in southern Wisconsin throughout June and July reduced the availability of brood-rearing habitat in this region, but field managers report good numbers of broods on the remaining wetlands. Precipitation was more consistent in north during this period, and brood-rearing conditions remained very good through July.

Wetland conditions were also favorable in the boreal forest regions of western Ontario and northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and duck populations increased in this region by 70 percent from the 2001 level. This will benefit duck hunters in Wisconsin, as ducks from this region comprise a significant portion of the state's harvest. However, dry conditions continued in prairie regions of the north central United States and south central Canada. While western portions of this region were relatively wet, overall the number of wetland basins on the prairies declined by 41 percent from 2001, and was 45 percent below the long-term average. Total duck numbers in this region also declined by 31 percent compared to 2001.

Although duck populations in the prairies are down, this region provides a relatively minor portion of the state's duck harvest. The health of duck populations in Wisconsin and the boreal forest should lead to a good duck season for state hunters this fall.

In 2002, Wisconsin will offer a 60-day duck season with a six duck daily bag. This year, Wisconsin had the option to split the season in each of the two duck management zones. This year, the season in the North Zone will begin on Sept. 28 and run straight through to Nov. 26.

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In the South Duck Zone, hunters favored a later opener with a split. The season in this zone will open on Oct. 5, close on Oct. 14, re-open on Oct. 19 and continue through Dec. 8.

Due to continued declines in the population of canvasback and pintail ducks, the canvasback season is closed this year and the pintail season has been shortened. The pintail season will run the first 30 days of the season, in each zone. The daily bag shall include not more than four mallards, one pintail (first 30 days), one black duck, two wood ducks, two redheads, and three scaup. The mallard daily bag may include no more than one hen mallard until Oct. 19, when it will increase to two per day. Waterfowl hunters should refer to the 2002 Migratory Bird Regulations for more details.

Canada Geese

Wisconsin generally sees significant numbers of Canada geese from two distinct breeding populations, the locally-nesting population composed of the giant subspecies, and migrant geese from the Mississippi Valley Population (MVP) that nest along the Hudson Bay coastline in northern Ontario.

Spring aerial surveys again revealed an increase in the size of our local nesting Canada goose population. The 2002 estimate of 143,484 geese was up 95 percent from 2001, and 207 percent above the long-term average. This estimate may also be low, as the survey is designed to estimate duck numbers. At the time the survey is flown, geese are generally already nesting, and being tied to nest sites likely makes them more difficult to observe from the air. These geese also likely benefited from the abundant wetland habitat available this spring, and field managers report good numbers of broods statewide.

This year Wisconsin will again offer a special early goose season, which focuses on these local geese. This season will run from Sept. 3-15, and hunters are reminded that they need an Early September Canada Goose permit in order to participate in this hunt.

Surveys of the MVP breeding range indicated an increase in population size of 40 percent from 2001 levels. However, this increase was tempered by reduced production. Typically, arctic-nesting geese rely on body fat for maintenance until nesting can commence. Hence, in a late year, geese have reduced amounts of energy to invest in egg production. The late spring in 2002 led to a reduction in both the numbers of nesting geese and the number of eggs laid per nest. The result is that, although the MVP increased substantially, the overall state harvest allocation is similar to that in 2001.

This year, hunters in the Horicon and Collins zones will receive two tags, and the daily bag limit in these zones has increased to two geese per day. The first hunting period in both of these zones opens on Sept. 16. The Exterior Zone will be divided up into North and South regions this year. The opening date for the exterior zone Canada goose season will be Sept. 21 in the North Zone and Sept. 28 in the South Zone. In the North Zone, the 94-day season will run straight through to Dec. 23, while in the South Zone the season will close during the split in the duck season, and will run until Jan. 2. The bag limit in both portions of the exterior zone will be one per day for the entire season.

Early September season and Exterior zone Canada goose hunters are reminded that they are required to report any Canada geese harvested within 48 hours, by calling 1-(800) 99-GOOSE. Exterior zone hunters may face a reduced season if the quota is reached early.

All migratory game bird hunters, including those that don't hunt waterfowl, but do hunt doves or woodcock, are reminded that they need to be certified under the Harvest Information Program (HIP) each year in Wisconsin. This can easily be done when you purchase your hunting license.

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Youth waterfowl hunt

A special youth waterfowl hunt will again be offered this year, on Sept. 21 and 22. The hunt is open to youth from 12 to 15 years of age. Youths must be hunter safety certified and HIP (harvest information program) certified. Those wishing to hunt geese must obtain the correct regular season Canada goose permit for the zone in which they'll be hunting. If hunting the Horicon or Collins Zones, a permit for any hunting period is valid.

All other licensing requirements (small game hunting license, state and federal waterfowl stamps) are waived for youth participating in the Sept. 21-22 hunt. All youth hunters must be accompanied by an adult chaperone, age 18 years or older. See the 2002 Wisconsin Migratory Bird Regulations for more details.

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Fall hunters reminded to make safety a priority

MADISON, Wis. – As hunters of all ages and capabilities begin planning to hunt their favorite game during the upcoming fall hunting seasons, safety experts with the Department of Natural Resources remind them not to forget to review firearm safety as part of their preparations.

Essential to any responsible hunting trip is an ironclad adherence to the four basic rules of firearm safety that can be easily recalled by remembering "TAB-K."

"Wardens investigate very few, if any, true accidents during any of our hunting seasons," said Tim Lawhern, hunter education administrator with the DNR. "Most of the time, when someone is involved in shooting another person or someone's property, the shooter has failed to follow one of the most basic rules of firearm safety covered by "TAB-K."

"TAB-K" means"

T Treat every firearm as if it's loaded.

A Always point your firearm's muzzle in a safe direction.

B Be certain of your intended target and that your shot has a safe backstop.

K Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to take your shot.

"While a hunter may certainly not have intended to harm another person with his or her firearm, the fact remains that most hunting-related firearm injuries result from a violation of one or more of these simple rules," Lawhern said. "It's not an accident when someone disregards safety precautions."

Planning your fall hunting trip also means having your gear in proper working order. Firearms should be cleaned and closely inspected for any signs of mechanical wear that could result in a problem in the field.

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But firearms aren't the only items to be checked well in advance of a hunting trip. The clothing that you'll wear and other equipment should also be inspected for signs of wear and tear.

"Anything that might lead you to compromise safety should be repaired, discarded or replaced," said Lawhern. "A jacket that doesn't fit right or a scope that isn't adjusted correctly could distract you when you ought to be concentrating on safety."

Special CWD zone safety considerations

Most hunters, including small game, turkey and archery, in southern Wisconsin will have to take an additional safety precaution this fall as blaze orange clothing is a requirement within the chronic wasting disease management zone – an area that covers parts or all of 13 counties including Columbia, Crawford, Dane, Grant Green, Iowa, Juneau, Lafayette, Marquette, Richland, Rock, Sauk and Vernon – when the expanded gun deer hunts are in effect in that area. Waterfowl hunters are exempt from having to wear blaze orange in the CWD management zone during those times. The department has published a special CWD regulation pamphlet that includes the dates of the extended gun seasons if you plan to hunt in southern Wisconsin this fall. The pamphlet is available on the DNR website and at license vendors and DNR service centers.

"Because of the extended gun deer hunting opportunities within the CWD management zone, all other hunters, except those hunting waterfowl, will have to wear at least 50 percent blaze orange above the waist when they're hunting within that area. That includes bow hunters," Lawhern said. "With the concentration of hunters we expect in that area it's wise to take this precaution. You might be a little more visible to your game, but you'll be a lot more visible to other hunters."

Game Specific Safety

While the "TAB-K" safety rules can be applied to any hunting situation, there are other general precautions to take when hunting Wisconsin's various types of game this fall.

Turkey

- Wear blaze orange clothing to and from the field.
- Don't stalk a turkey. Stalking a calling turkey usually means you're stalking another hunter.
- Be aware of other hunters. Overlapping seasons in the fall means you're likely to have company. If you're wearing camouflage, let others know of your whereabouts by shouting out to them or posting blaze orange strips on nearby trees or bushes.

Waterfowl

- If hunting from a boat or canoe, follow rules of safe boating. Wear lifejackets.
- Wear blaze orange to and from your boat or blind.
- If hunting with a dog, keep your dog's safety in mind, too.
- Unload your gun before setting it down. A few accidents happen when the dog steps on the trigger, firing the gun.

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Small Game (pheasant, upland birds, squirrel, rabbit, fox, raccoon, etc.)

- When hunting birds, know your safe zone of fire at all times. Know where your partners are and where you can safely shoot.
- Most bird hunting happens on public land. Be aware that others might be hunting in a nearby field. Look for signs of other hunters such as vehicles in the parking lot or flashes of blaze orange.
- Squirrel hunting is often best in the morning. Carry a flashlight to help walk through woods without stumbling.
- Only shoot at squirrels that have a safe backstop. If you can see daylight behind the squirrel, think of where your shot could go if you miss your target. If you're shooting a .22 rifle, that bullet could travel a mile or so.

Archery

- "TAB-K" rules apply in bow hunting.
- Wear blaze orange over your camouflage to and from your tree stand or blind.
- Let other hunters know you're near by calling out to them.
- If hunting from a treestand, use a proper-fitting fall restraint device.

Last year, Wisconsin recorded a total of 51 hunting-related firearm injuries with six fatalities. Overall, hunting is getting safer due in large part to mandatory hunter education for youngsters 12 and older and those born on or after Jan.1, 1973. Many adults are also taking a hunter education class as safety certification is required to hunt game in some popular western states.

"We will see the day when there are no firearm injuries during any hunting season in Wisconsin," Lawhern said. "But that day will only come when every hunter takes it upon him or herself to practice firearm safety 100 percent of the time.

"All hunters should do their part to create a new tradition in Wisconsin by making our hunting seasons free of firearm injuries," Lawhern concluded.

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**Special
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**2002
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